

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Friday, May 18, 2007

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Article published May 18, 2007

Berrien County Dept. of Human Services in need of foster parents

By **KELLI CHEATHAM**
WSBT-TV Reporter

A local county is pleading for help this morning because they need more foster parents. The Berrien County Department of Human Services says it is running out of places for foster children to go. In Berrien County alone, there are about 450 kids in the foster care system. Right now, about half of them need foster homes where they can stay. A foster parent is someone trained and certified to have all the duties of a normal parent. They take care of children who have been removed from their biological or custodial parents.

Though the care can be challenging, some people in Berrien County are making the commitment to be there for children in their community. They say it's a life-changing experience.

For David and Nancy Brelowski, it was the pain of a miscarriage that helped make up their minds.

"It was something that we both kind of just looked at each other and literally said at the same time that we wanted to be foster parents," said David.

That was more than seven years ago. Now, more than a dozen foster kids later, the Berrien County couple tells WSBT News they can't imagine their lives any other way.

"You just fall in love with each child that comes because each one is different," said Nancy Brelowski.

Luke was no exception. Before deciding to care for Luke, the couple had just sent a previous child they fostered to a new family that was a great match.

"We had her for a year and it was really hard," Nancy told WSBT News. "I told them 'I need time off, I need a month,' and two weeks later they said 'Nancy there's no one else in the county that can take him.'"

Luke was an infant at the time. The government said his birth mother wasn't a fit parent. So the Brelowskis opened their home again. The Department of Human Services desperately needs families like this one.

David Fernandez told WSBT News the department is committed to the idea that every child deserves a positive relationship with a caring adult.

Fernandez also said foster families are very transient -- meaning they often take in as many children as they can.

"Everyone can make a difference if they just open up their hearts and home to a child," he said.

But sometimes those homes fill up. The short term stays often turn into adoptions, which can limit the number of kids a foster family wants to accept. That takes some parents off the fostering market.

"For me, you have to get attached to the foster child or I'm not a good foster parent -- you know, by meeting their needs on a daily basis and loving them," said Nancy Brelowski.

The Brelowskis admit fostering isn't easy, especially when it comes to saying goodbye.

Nancy says she's shed a lot of tears when it comes to sending the children on, even if it's a great situation. "It's just because I know I will miss them so much," she told WSBT News.

But the personal rewards are what drive the couple to keep taking kids; and guiding them toward the track to success.

"As they grow up, you might see them later and know that you had a part just getting them where they need to be," said David Brelowski.

Berrien County's Department of Human Services representative David Fernandez says the need for a continuum of foster parents coming into the county is always going to be there.

"There is never a point where we are going to say we have enough foster homes," he said.

The problem is very real for the Department of Human Services.

"What we find at large is that although these children have issues or may come to us with issues, they are primarily good children," Fernandez told WSBT News.

Anita Jones is another foster parent. She's been doing it for about four years.

"You get so attached to 'em," said Jones. "You just don't wanna let go."

Jones says she keeps fostering because it just feels right. Her parents used to take in people off the street, and there were always strangers in her house. But that doesn't mean keeping up with up to five kids at a time is easy. Jones, however, says she can't see herself doing anything else.

"I love my kids," she said.

While Jones is in the process of adopting 3 children she currently fosters, she's also an example of why there is such a need for new foster parents. David Fernandez with the Department of Human Services says the majority of foster situations end in adoption.

"Once they've made that step, once they've seen what they can do for a child, often times they think 'it isn't the child necessarily that changed, it is my life that has changed,'" said Fernandez.

Foster parents often get to choose the ages of the children they take.

The Berrien County Department of Human Services says they have less of a problem finding homes for babies and smaller children; but they also need people willing to take kids who are a little older.

The median age of foster kids in Berrien county is seven years old....but ages range from newborns to teens.

The problem of finding foster care isn't just in Berrien County or Michigan. While there are 18,000 kids in Michigan's foster system, there are 9,000 in Indiana's. In St. Joseph County, Indiana there are more than 700 children and young adults in the foster system.

One problem within the foster system in St. Joseph County is finding homes for juvenile delinquents. Officials at the Juvenile Justice Center in St. Joseph County told WSBT News they're desperately searching for foster homes for troubled teens.

Right now in St. Joseph County, there are more than 25 juvenile delinquent teens in the foster system. The Juvenile Justice Center told WSBT News they will soon need about 8 more foster homes.

The Justice Center says it's often so difficult to find foster care for these teens, because many of them have been arrested, involved in drugs or gotten into other kids of trouble.

Troubled teens who aren't ready for a foster family spend time in foster group homes. After receiving treatment at the Juvenile Justice Center, many of those trouble teens face things like learning disabilities, depression and emotional issues.

If you are interested in becoming a foster parent in Berrien County, you can get more information at some upcoming meetings there on May 31st and June 28th. The Department of Human Services urges you to call them with questions. That number is (269) 934-2092 or (269) 934-2079. The number to call in St. Joseph County, Indiana is (574) 236-5411.



Judge orders trial in baby's death

Friday, May 18, 2007

LaNIA COLEMAN

THE SAGINAW NEWS

BAD AXE -- A 21-year-old Bad Axe man will stand trial on first-degree murder charges in the death of his girlfriend's 19-month-old son.

Huron County District Judge Karl E. Kraus concluded a Wednesday preliminary hearing by ruling that sufficient evidence exists for Brandon S. Smith to face a jury in the beating death of Nickolas Crowell. Smith will face arraignment in Circuit Court at 1:30 p.m. Monday, June 4.

The youngster died of blunt force trauma to his abdomen April 5 at his mother's home in Bad Axe. Smith and the tot's mother, 19-year-old Ashley Walls, lived together.

Walls and her mother, Brenda Walls, had gone to a Wal-Mart to buy Easter candy and had left the boy in Smith's care, Saginaw News records show. Smith and the youngster were alone in the apartment when the youngster suffered his injuries.

Walls discovered that her son was not breathing about

2 p.m. when she went to check on him in the crib where she thought the boy was napping, News records show. Medical Examiner Dr. Kanu Virani has said an autopsy revealed Crowell had multiple injuries, including two broken ribs from a previous trauma.

The final blows he suffered left his lungs bruised and his spleen lacerated in three places, Virani has said. The injuries produced internal bleeding that caused the baby's death. v

LaNia Coleman covers law enforcement. You may reach her at 776-9690.

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05/17/2007

Smith bound over to circuit court in death of child

STACY LANGLEY , The Huron Daily Tribune

BAD AXE — The attorney for an Ubyly man facing a charge of first-degree murder in the death of a 19-month-old Bad Axe boy was preparing his client for a lengthy trial long before the preliminary examination phase was over.

Five witnesses testified at Wednesday's preliminary exam/probable cause hearing for Brandon Smith. Police and Huron County prosecutors claim he was caring for Nickolas "Nicky" Crowell on April 5 when the boy sustained blunt forced trauma to his abdomen resulting in his death. Huron County District Court Judge Karl E. Kraus ruled there was probable cause to determine a crime was committed and that Smith was alone with the child leading up to the child's death.

Security at the Huron County Building was tight as friends and family of both Smith and the child's mother, Ashley Walls, attended the proceeding which started Wednesday morning and went into the afternoon.

Smith sat quietly beside his attorney Michael Manley during testimony, occasionally glancing at Walls as she testified about the events that led up to and followed the death of her son.

Walls, 19, told Kraus Smith was her boyfriend at the time of the incident and was living with her and her son at her Bad Axe apartment.

She said her son was ill the day before his death, running a fever and vomiting, but the next morning the boy woke up at 7:45 a.m. and appeared to be "feeling fine".

Walls said she gave her son some applesauce, a bath, played with him and then made plans to pick her mother and brother up near Elkton and go Easter shopping in Bad Axe for her son and Smith's son, leaving Smith alone in the apartment to babysit her son.

As Walls prepared to leave the apartment April 5, she said her son was crying and she put him in his crib while Smith was playing an X-Box in the bedroom at the apartment shortly after 10:30 a.m.

She said Smith gave her money and a kiss good-bye before she left and she could hear her son still crying as she closed the apartment door.

"He (her son) hated when I wasn't there," Walls said, telling the court that was the reason her son was crying as she left the apartment that day.

Walls told the court she picked up her mother and brother, made three stops — to get her mother's medication, then to Wal-Mart for Easter items, then the Shell gas station — before returning to the apartment shortly after noon.

"When I walked in Brandon (Smith) was standing by the high-chair and couch," said Walls who explained she showed Smith what she bought for her son and his son from Wal-Mart for Easter as Smith was slipping on his shoes to leave the apartment.

Walls told the court she had plans with Smith to go to the hospital to visit Smith's nephew while her mother and brother were going to babysit her son who was sleeping in the crib when she returned from shopping.

When Walls returned to the apartment from her trip with Smith to the hospital, she said her mother was asking how long her son normally naps for, then asked to see the boy before she went home that day.

Walls' demeanor changed instantly as she began to tell the court what she discovered when she walked into her son's room.

"I said Nicky, Nickolas, and he didn't respond," she said.

She said as she looked into the crib she could see her son facing toward the window with his eyes rolled back into his head and the boy was "sheet white".

Both Walls and her mother testified Wednesday that what followed were attempts by the mother, grandmother and Smith to resuscitate Nickolas

Advertisement



Crowell. A call to 9-1-1 was reported at 1:54 p.m. followed by the arrival of police and an ambulance to transport the boy to Huron Medical Center.

As Huron County Prosecuting Attorney Mark J. Gaertner questioned Walls, she told him Smith told her at the hospital he never went into the child's room while she was shopping but then recanted his story to her and said he went into the child's room that day and "squeezed him like a bear hug."

Walls said during that conversation with Smith he also asked her not to tell the police about him squeezing the boy because he felt he would be in trouble. "Nickolas wasn't lovie-dovie with Brandon (Smith). For the most part, he didn't want Brandon (Smith) to hold him or play with him," she told the court, adding the child was more affectionate with her male friends and Smith's male friends compared to Smith.

Walls told the court of two occasions that she was upset with Smith over the way he was treating her son.

On one occasion, "Brandon had him up in the air, shaking him, holding him and yelling 'stop crying'," she said.

As Smith's attorney questioned Walls about how she felt about Smith being around her son early in her relationship with Smith, she told the court she observed Smith early on interact with his own son and felt he was a "great daddy".

"He helped me when I needed help, he was a good guy," she said, telling the court as Smith spent time with her son she felt he was more strict with her son than his own son.

Walls also told the court of a second instance she recalled when she and Smith fought after she came home with her friend and realized her son's buttocks were "all red" because Smith spanked him for not picking up his toys.

Questioning by Manley then turned to the subject of Walls' mother, who also babysat the boy the day of his death. Walls told the court her mother does have a mental illness and when taking her medication for her bipolar disorder she's "fine". She also added that her mother has been in rehab for a time for a prescription drug problem but had been "doing fine" at the time of her son's death.

Det./Sgt. Ron Roberts, from the Huron County Sheriff's Office, also testified Wednesday. He told the court he heard the 9-1-1 call over the police scanner reporting a "baby not breathing" on April 5 and responded to the Port Crescent Apartment to help.

Roberts said during the death investigation he read Smith his Miranda Rights and then interviewed Smith about what he knew about the child's death just hours after the child was pronounced dead at the hospital.

Roberts described Smith as soft spoken and calm when they talked.

"He didn't show any emotion except on one occasion when he was telling about starting to give CPR, I noticed a tear in his eyes," Roberts said.

Roberts said he noticed bruises on the child briefly at the apartment and at the hospital, causing him to have some concern about the quantity of bruises he noticed on the child's body.

Dr. Richard E. Lockard, Huron County medical examiner, pronounced the child dead at Huron Medical Center on April 5. Lockard said Wednesday in court he was called to the hospital to determine the cause and manner of the child's death which he determined to be due to blunt forced trauma.

Lockard said while at the hospital the day of the child's death he ordered a full body X-ray of the child and noticed the child had several broken ribs from a "significant trauma". Lockard said the rib fractures were not caused on April 5 but were in the process of healing from an unrelated incident.

Initially, Lockard put Crowell's time of death between 7 and 9 a.m. on April 5 due to rigormortus (tightening the muscles after death) observed in the child. He then explained Dr. Kanu Virani, forensic pathologist and medical examiner who was also working on the case the following day and conducted the autopsy, taught him that factors like fever, a warm environment, struggle or fatigue make rigormortus set in quicker — especially in a slender, muscular child like Crowell. Those factors coupled with statements by the mother, grandmother and Smith put the child still alive at 11 a.m.

When Virani took the witness stand Wednesday afternoon he explained his job as a forensic pathologist is to not only take evidence that he collects during an autopsy but also use information given to him by detectives to piece together and help narrow the time of death.

Virani told the court he puts the time of the child's death between 11 a.m. and noon on April 5.

"Despite what you see on CSI, we can not determine the exact time of said about the medical evidence alone.

He said the cause of death was blunt force trauma to the child's abdomen with "quite a lot of force" causing internal bleeding leading to the child's death within 4 to 5 minutes.

Upon questioning, Virani said at the child's weight (30 to 35 pounds), he could not have injured himself by falling out of his crib to the extent he was injured.

Gaertner asked if a "bear hug" could cause the severe injuries Virani observed the child had sustained. Virani said "no". He then demonstrated to the court that someone would have to wrap their arms around the child, then with a lot of force quickly squeeze the child's abdomen tight and upward to cause significant injuries.

When Virani stepped down both Gaertner and Manley were at odds over the testimony in the case.

Kraus told both attorneys that Virani's testimony had convinced him the level of probable cause needed existed to bind Smith over to circuit court and face the felony murder charge which carries a possible sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole if he's convicted.

Smith is scheduled to appear for circuit court for his arraignment on the charge at 1:30 p.m. June 4. At that time Huron County Circuit Court Judge M. Richard Knoblock will set a trial date to hear all of the evidence from both sides in the case.

Smith remains lodged in the Huron County Jail.

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May 16, 2007

Children in middle of peyote use case

Should Native American parents be allowed to give their minor children hallucinogenic peyote as part of Indian religious ceremonies?

That may be at the heart of a case that will be heard Friday in Leelanau County by family court Judge Joseph E. Deegan, according to county prosecutor Joseph T. Hubbell.

“Tied into this case is a First Amendment religious freedom argument,” Hubbell said. “Generally, the law prohibits any interference with Native American religious practices.”

Nonetheless, Hubbell is asking Deegan to “take jurisdiction” over five minor children who, according to court papers, “may be or are eligible to be members of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians (GTB) and/or are children of Native American parent(s).”

Hubbell said he could not explain why the GTB Tribal Court had not taken jurisdiction in the case. Tribal Prosecutor Sara Brubaker did not return a reporter’s phone call.

The former chief judge of the Tribal Court, Katherine Scotta, resigned unexpectedly in January following months of bitter infighting and Tribal Court challenges among candidates in a long-postponed Tribal Council election. A replacement for Scotta has not yet been named.

Coincidentally, an associate judge now shouldering much of the Tribal Court’s caseload, Wilson D. Brott, works part-time as an assistant Leelanau County prosecutor. Brott could not be reached for comment.

According to court documents, the father of three of the children who were allegedly given peyote in Suttons Bay Township. The mothers of the three children are different women, two of whom the father never married, according to court documents.

One of the father’s three children, an eight year-old boy, lives with him. The two other children, girls aged 7 and 2, live with their mothers in Leelanau County.

One of the father’s girls and two other girls who were allegedly given peyote – a nine year-old and a seven year-old – reside with their mother in Suttons Bay. According to court documents, she was never married to any of the three men who fathered her three children.

The mother admitted to a social worker “that her children have taken the medicine,” according to court documents.

An investigation conducted earlier this year by the Grand Traverse/Leelanau Department of Human Services led up to the current Family Court proceedings. A preliminary Family Court hearing in the case was held April 25. A pretrial hearing will be held Friday.

According to court documents, one of the children – the seven-year-old female – described a gathering attended by her father, mother and others, during which “there is a medicine that she does not like and tea.”

The medicine “looks like mud and the tea is green,” according to a report of the social worker’s interview with the girl. “The medicine is in a bowl which is passed around and she had one spoonful. The tea is contained in a bucket into which everybody scoops out with a cup. (The girl) stated after she takes the medicine she kind of has a headache.”

A Child Protective Services worker who interviewed the girl and her half siblings said the eight-year old boy “explained that Peyote opens our mind to God’s ways and helps you to be brave and do a very good thing. Peyote is in a bowl which is passed around, using a spoon.”

The boy is reported to have said that the peyote “makes him feel good.” He said that when another child tried to spit it out, “a lot of grownups told her to swallow it.”

Another child told the social worker that “she takes the medicine every time at church,” according to court documents. “They meet in teepees when the weather is warm and at people’s houses.”

A number of the children and their parents were interviewed at Suttons Bay Elementary School in February by a Child Protective Services worker, according to court documents.

The court documents include reports from Munson Medical Center indicating that tests of the children’s urine were conducted – and results were positive for mescaline, one of the active ingredients in peyote.

Peyote is a species of cactus that is indigenous to the American southwest. Its use is not associated with traditional practices of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians or other Great Lakes tribes.

Historically, the use of peyote has been more closely associated with religious practices of tribes in Arizona and New Mexico.

Senate Passes Sexual Misconduct Bill

MIRS, May 17, 2007

Today the Senate unanimously passed a bill (**SB 0386**) that includes volunteers, employees and contractual service providers in the list of people who can be found guilty of sexual misconduct.

Currently the Michigan Child Welfare Law states that only teachers, substitute teachers or administrators can be found guilty of such a crime.

"To protect our children, the law must include individuals in position of authority," said Sen. Bruce **PATTERSON** (R-Canton). "Our children should feel that they are in a safe environment when they are at school."



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Medicaid cuts prompt sit-in in cyberspace

Protest targets state Web sites today

Thursday, May 17, 2007

If, as activists hope, state government Web sites are loaded today with protesters who object to Medicaid funding cuts, Ann Arbor will have been the epicenter of a cyber sit-in.

Well, the virtual epicenter.

The planned "hacktivism" started with a parent's letter in a University of Michigan hospitals newsletter for parents whose kids rely on ventilation services from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital.

The letter talked about the impact the cuts could have on the strides those kids have made, and it got Ann Arbor resident Keith Alexander thinking.

Alexander talked with other parents he had met through the pediatric pulmonary unit programs.

The result is a trio of videos on the Web site YouTube.com and a plan for online civil disobedience, which - oddly enough - was made possible through an even more chance meeting with another parent at Mott.

That parent is Ricardo Dominguez, a founder of something called the Electronic Disturbance Theater.

As folks who may have followed international cyber sit-ins on behalf of the Zapatista rebels in Mexico and similar protests know, I'm not making this up. The Electronic Disturbance Theater is a real organization created in the 1990s by socially and politically aware techies who saw an opportunity for mass, nonviolent action in digital space.

Recent sit-ins have included a protest of Philippine police and support for striking French students. And if the e-mail and YouTube campaigns that began this week prompt enough people to take part in today's cyber action, Gov. Jennifer Granholm, the Michigan Senate and House of Representatives will be the newest targets.

The message, says the 47-year-old Alexander, is "stop Medicaid cuts."

"You can see the difference Medicaid money makes," says Alexander, whose 5-year-old daughter has special needs that make her eligible for the program. "It's a government program that works. I can't imagine people not wanting to support it."

Although the youngster has undergone multiple heart and other surgeries and continues to rely on a ventilator to breath, other families face more serious problems, he says.

They're the kind of problems where the ability to hire a night nurse or purchase a generator to keep life-sustaining equipment running in a power outage can mean the difference between life and death, says his wife, Sandra Gunning.

"This is about real kids and real struggles," says Gunning, a faculty member at U-M. "This isn't a group of trouble-makers, but it is a population that's very vulnerable. We can't be invisible."

Alexander and Gunning met Dominguez at Mott this past summer.

Dominguez, who teaches at the University of California at San Diego, was traveling when his son fell ill. "The bad news was that he was seriously ill," says Dominguez, whose research includes electronic civil disobedience. "The lucky part is that we happened to be somewhere with a very good children's hospital."

In the course of that hospital stay, Alexander and Gunning heard about the California family and sought them out. "I had no prior relationship with Keith, but they were very kind," says Dominguez.

He was ready to help when Alexander proposed the cyber sit-in.

Scheduled to begin this morning and continue until 6 a.m. Friday, protesters begin by visiting a Web site and then following a link. Participants will be able to set their Web browsers to reload - or refresh - continuously, generating an unusual number of requests for the targeted Web pages.

"It's not designed to take over a Web site," says Dominguez, who distinguishes between hacking (covert) and electronic civil disobedience (open and transparent). In fact, the action may or may not slow the state Web sites.

What it will do is upload questions that will let state officials know the protesters are there. For example, "Does health care exist on this server?"

"The main element is a symbolic disturbance, not a technical takedown," says Dominguez, who's using a student researchers' Web site at the California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology for the protest.

The newness of online protest also attracts welcomed attention, he allows. I was not the only journalist who had called.

Alexander's YouTube videos, which feature families in Calhoun and Barry counties as well as his own daughter, conclude with text pointing to the "CALIT" Web site bang.calit2.net/sdhacklab/.

He and others in what he describes as a grass-roots protest also have been sending e-mail to friends everywhere asking for help.

Does it make sense?

It's probably no more or less effective than a good old-fashioned picket. And, based on Dominguez's explanation, there's no reason to think it creates any more or less trouble or expense for others.

Of course, I write this some 18 hours ahead of the planned cyber sit-in and security officials at the state Department of Information Technology are as interested in discouraging the sit-in as Alexander is promoting it.

"We're obviously speculating at this point," says IT security boss Dan Lohrmann, "but there are federal and state laws that could apply."

State law prohibits activity that, among other things, disrupts government operations or public safety. Lohrmann further raises questions about exposing your computer to potential security risks.

But Alexander and company are far more worried about their ability to tap Medicaid dollars for the in-home health-care supplies their families use. And the rest of us may have as much to fear from the economic meltdown that sparked the budget crisis - and the stubborn political interests prolonging it - as we do from any off-beat academic's IT mischief.

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Kahn, Dems spar over Medicaid cuts

Friday, May 18, 2007

BARRIE BARBER

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Who's the hypocrite?

A Democratic Party spokesman called state Sen. Roger N. Kahn's vote to cut Medicaid hypocritical after the Republican blasted Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm's

6 percent cut to the health insurance plan.

Kahn, who voted for a

3 percent Medicaid cut Wednesday that excluded hospitals, countered that the hypocrisy is on the other side of the aisle.

"What's hypocritical is to say a 3 percent cut is worse than a 6 percent cut," the Saginaw Township Republican said Thursday. "It's worse than hypocritical; it's brain dead."

Kahn this week questioned whether the governor cares about the patients her proposal affects.

Senate Democratic Caucus spokes-man Tom Lenard criticized the senator's vote.

"He's trying to have his cake and eat it too by making these comments about the governor and yet still voting for this kind of approach," he said.

Kahn earlier chided Granholm's plan to cut \$49 million from Medicaid if lawmakers don't find a solution by June 1 to a projected \$700 million deficit this year. "Those who would vote for those kind of cuts are, in my opinion, trying to extort money from hospitals and (engage in) blackmail," he told The Saginaw News on Tuesday.

He said the result would shortchange medical providers who already receive below-cost reimbursements, violate reimbursement rates set in legislation last year and may encourage some health care providers to drop Medicaid patients.

"Those people end up getting sicker and sicker, and their prognosis gets worse and people die," he had said. "Let's call it the way it is: Children die. This governor needs to understand something about caring, and she apparently does not."

Lenard said Sen. Hansen Clarke, a Detroit Democrat, referred to the comments on the Senate floor.

Michigan Medical Society officials told Kahn that a 3 percent reduction is better than 6 percent, the cardiologist said Thursday, while noting the cut would affect his practice too.

"That's half of what the governor proposed," he said. "In general, I would like to see no hospital cut and provider cut, but Michigan is in hard times. I felt we had to do something to balance our budget."

The reduction was part of two wide-ranging bills to pare the deficit. Senate Republicans also voted for a \$36 per pupil school aid cut versus a proposal from the governor to reduce it by \$122 per student, Kahn said. Still, the lawmaker voted against the education cuts, saying he supports full funding for schools.

"The people of the state of Michigan need to understand that this budget can be fixed and was fixed by the Senate without a tax increase," he said.

Granholt spokeswoman Liz Boyd said Granholt still favors a comprehensive solution to reform government spending, cut the budget and bring in additional revenue to resolve the deficit. Cutting the budget alone will not work, the spokeswoman said.

Boyd, who said Tuesday that Kahn's comments were off the mark, declined comment on Kahn's vote on Medicaid. "We'll leave it for others to judge," she said. v

Barrie Barber covers politics and government. You may reach him at 776-9725.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Walters-Steinacker gets probation in day care case

Friday, May 18, 2007

From News staff reports

A Brighton woman charged with operating a day care without a license has been sentenced in Livingston County District Court to probation, with no jail time.

Susan Walters-Steinacker, 52, who considers herself a local government watchdog, had been caring for three young children at her home.

Walters-Steinacker was sentenced Tuesday by Judge Carol Sue Reader to six months on probation. She was ordered to serve 10 days of community service and assessed fines, court costs and a probationary fee. She will be released from probation early if she becomes licensed, according to a court spokeswoman.

Walters-Steinacker pleaded guilty in April to the misdemeanor charge of operating an unlicensed day care business.

Brighton Police investigated, saying she continued to offer day care services from her home without proper state registration after being notified she must discontinue the practice or become certified. According to state regulations, those operating a child or adult day care business in their home for more than four weeks out of the year must be licensed.

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Uncle arrested for assault against his nephew

Spinal Column

May 16, 2007 - A 22-year-old Commerce Township man sustained head injuries during a reported altercation with his uncle, 49, of White Lake Township, according to an Oakland County Sheriff's Department report.

Deputies from the Oakland County Sheriff's Department Commerce Township Substation arrived at the scene in the 800 block of Elsmere Street to find the victim "bleeding profusely" from his head. He was allegedly assaulted by his uncle — who reportedly admitted to the assault — with a carpenter's square.

The suspect, who was transported to the Oakland County Jail in Pontiac without incident, told deputies that he was talking on the phone with his wife when the victim hit him in the head with a metal object.

The victim — who, the day prior to the alleged assault had reportedly overdosed on heroin and was asked to leave the residence, according to a separate substation report — was transported to a hospital after he sustained three lacerations each between 3 and 4 inches in length on the top of his head.



Food donations skyrocket

Friday, May 18, 2007

JEAN SPENNER

THE SAGINAW NEWS

On a day when the sun shone and no controversy was afoot, mid-Michigan postal workers collected 18 percent more food than they did during last year's drive.

Saginaw Valley communities participating in the 15th annual National Association of Letter Carriers event -- including Freeland for the first time -- picked up 93,625 pounds of non-perishable items Saturday.

Last year the carriers gathered 79,410 pounds. Mid-Michigan postal workers' goal for this year was 80,000 pounds, said Lori Wilson, coordinator for Saginaw Township-based Branch 74.

"Our national union's goal was for 10 percent more food than last year, so we really beat that," Wilson said.

She credited all the participating communities but gave a special nod to Freeland residents and to Lawndale Estates, a Saginaw Township manufactured home park that typically is a top giver.

"The Lawndale residents are kind of famous out there for that," Wilson said.

Wilson also praised volunteers who unloaded mail trucks and helped load vans for the agencies receiving food. "Teen Challenge workers stayed the whole day," she said.

Branch 74 members quelled a past year's controversy by voting to give food to the East Side Soup Kitchen this year, Wilson said.

Two years ago, Teamsters Local 486 withheld its delivery trucks to protest the use of non-union labor in the construction of the Hunger Solution Center, 940 E. Genesee in Saginaw. The \$3 million center gave the East Side Soup Kitchen and Hidden Harvest a new joint home.

Others receiving food were Good Neighbors Mission, Neighborhood House, Em-maus House, Youth Services, Mustard Seed, Jeannine House, Saginaw Rescue Mission, West Michigan Avenue Southwest Area Emergency Food Pantry, Sheridan Road Baptist Church, Teen Parent Services, Teen Challenge, Safe Haven House, Underground Railroad, First Ward Community Center and the Salvation Army. v

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Charities say giving falls off as need rises

Friday, May 18, 2007

By Ron Cammel

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Usually at this time of year, 30 large bins at In the Image are filled with clothes and housewares donated by spring cleaners.

This week, 29 sat empty and the charity organization distributed items from a single bin to about 350 low-income people.

"We are down considerably," said Director Paul Haagsman. "And need is up."

His guess: Would-be donors are running garage sales to cover their own increase in expenses.

Meanwhile, economic woes are driving more people to use the free service. Seven years ago, the ministry would see 60 to 75 people on distribution days, Haagsman said. Now hundreds line up hours before the doors open.

The scenario is repeated throughout area agencies, and the hike in gas prices is not helping.

"It's the perfect storm," said John Arnold, director of Second Harvest Gleaners, which conducted its first spring direct-mail campaign to cut a \$206,000 deficit.

The agency trucks in some 20 million pounds of donated food a year from around the country and trucks it out to 1,200 pantries and mobile sites.

Gas prices forced Second Harvest to increase its price for organizations receiving food. A mobile pantry that paid \$325 a month for 7,000 pounds now must pay \$580.

"If gas prices go up more, we have no Plan B," Arnold said.

More than 15,000 people use food pantries in a network coordinated by ACCESS. That is a 50 percent increase from five years ago, said director Bruce Schlenderer.

Continuing unemployment is to blame, he said.

"If you don't get a job in six months, you run out of funds and friends," he said. "So you go to a pantry."

"Clients say they never thought they'd need to stand in line for a turkey or get assistance for utilities or use a food pantry," said Sandy Waite of North Kent Service Center, which has four pantries. "We hear it on a daily basis now."

Though donations are holding steady at ACCESS, volunteers who transport food or drive clients to job interviews are starting to ask for fuel reimbursement.

"It's not pocket change anymore," he said.

The slump in home construction has led to empty shelves at Home Repair Services, which distributes donated materials to low-income homeowners.

"April was the worst month in four and a half years," said director Dave Jacobs. "And this is a time when donations usually are going up."

He said less remodeling and new construction means fewer scratch-and-dent items to be donated. The service is turning away people seeking aid.

While monetary donations are keeping up, Home Repair Services' foreclosure intervention program has seen a "dramatic increase" in need, Jacobs said. The agency needs to raise \$100,000 to fund counselors to mitigate with homeowners and mortgage companies.

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State budget deficit is \$400 million worse than estimated

May 18, 2007

By CHRIS CHRISTOFF

FREE PRESS LANSING BUREAU CHIEF

LANSING — State policymakers got more grim news today: The state's budget deficit has ballooned to about \$800 million for the current year — up about \$400 million from previous estimates.

The big reasons for the growing deficit is weak tax revenues, especially sales, personal income and business, and increased caseloads for welfare, Medicaid and a growing prison population.

The latest deficit estimate puts even greater pressure on Gov. Jennifer Granholm and lawmakers to resolve the deficit before June 1 when cuts in state funding to schools and Medicaid are to take effect.

The new revenue estimate today pegs the school aid cut at \$116 per pupil, instead of the \$122 per pupil previously ordered by Granholm. Sales tax revenues were slightly higher than Granholm had anticipated.

State Treasurer Robert Kleine said the revenue estimates are conservative.

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